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Appropriations Committee

March 1, 2023

Public Hearing on H.B. 6659 An Act Concerning the State Budget for the Biennium Ending June 30, 2025 and Making Appropriations Therefor.

Good afternoon Senator Osten, Representative Walker, Senator Berthel, Representative Nuccio and members of the Appropriations Committee.

My name is Sabrina Trocchi, President/Chief Executive Officer of Wheeler Clinic, Inc. Wheeler provides a comprehensive continuum of integrated primary care, mental health, and substance abuse recovery, community justice, education, child welfare, early childhood and prevention and wellness services to over 50,000 children, families, and adults in communities across Connecticut. Wheeler's federally qualified health centers (FQHCs) in the Hartford, New Britain, Bristol, Waterbury, and Plainville communities serve over 19,000 children, families, and adults and offer cost-effective integrated primary care and behavioral health services aimed at improving health outcomes and the care experience of individuals served. The services we provide are highly effective in helping these individuals and families function successfully in the community.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on H.B. 6659, the Governor's Budget. I am here to request that you increase funding for community nonprofits during the biennium by 9% in FY24, the first year, and 7% in FY25, the second year, and to index future increases to inflation. This funding is crucial to honoring your long-term plan to increase funding for community nonprofits because it makes up for the high inflation nonprofits have experienced over the last two years.

The increases the legislature provided in the last biennium were deeply appreciated by those who depend on the vital services that nonprofits provide in every city and town in Connecticut but is just the start of a long-term effort to make up for lost funding. But these advances could be lost if increases do not continue, given the magnitude of inflation on top of the nonprofit funding deficit.

There is a severe shortage of staff to serve children and families in Connecticut. Nonprofits have been losing clinical staff to telehealth companies, school districts, hospitals, and private practice all because what the state pays for services doesn't allow us to pay those staff competitively. We're also losing staff to the State, which is running a well-funded PR campaign to hire healthcare staff.

Last year, the COLA allowed us to increase salaries, which helped somewhat – but was not enough to compensate for the flat funding that we have experienced in our grant funded programs and in our reimbursement rates for so many years. We strive to maximize what we can to increase salaries and to develop retention incentives, but we have also had to contend with the continued escalation of costs in all other areas of operation, rent, utilities, mileage reimbursement, providing healthcare benefits, etc.

The needs of our children and families are growing rapidly. Demand for our services has increased dramatically. Waiting lists for children's services are growing longer and longer. Providers are



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being asked to serve kids with increasingly high needs, while inpatient services and emergency departments can't find places for kids to go in the community. Amidst all this, the Governor's budget proposes a reduction of \$16.5 million from out-of-home care, to reflect "utilization trends." How can utilization for out-of-home care be low enough for a reduction of this magnitude if there are waiting lists for services across the system?

Thank you for the opportunity to provide my perspective on the budget. Please support increasing funding for community nonprofits by 9% in FY24 and 7% in FY25, and to index future increases to inflation.

Thank you for this opportunity to be heard. I am happy to answer any questions that you have.

Respectfully,

Sabrina Trocchi, PhD, MPA

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